DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 197 320 CS 005 857

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TITLE Linguistic Emphases in Recent Reading Research.
PUB DATE Sep 80
NOTE 16p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Reading Association of Ireland (5th, Dublin, Ireland, September 11-13, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Discourse Analysis: Interaction: *Linguistics: *Psycholinguistics: Reading Instruction: *Reading Research: *Sociolinguistics

ABSTRACT

Noting that the growth of linguistics as a discipline has been accompanied by an awareness of the relevance of linguistic research to the study and teaching of reading, this paper examines four points at which linguists and reading researchers have met. The four areas reviewed are: (1) linguistic methods in teaching reading, (2) sociolinguistics and reading, (3) the psycholinguistics of reading, and (4) analysis of text and discourse. The paper concludes that emphases in modern linguistics on interaction and on text, taken with the well-established rigor in analysis and description, are important for future reading research. (Author/FL)

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LINGUISTIC EMPHASES IN RECENT READING RESEARCH

Paper for Fifth Annual Conference of the Reading Association of Ireland, Dublin, September, 1980

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ABSTRACT

Most research in reading has employed the methodology of psychological studies applied to curriculum concerns. More recently the growth of linguistics as a discipline has been accompanied by awareness of the relevance of linguistic research to the study and teaching of reading. Linguistics is a broad area, however, and misconceptions and misunderstandings have arisen. This paper reviews - suggestively rather than exhaustively - work in four main areas: linguistic methods in teaching reading, sociolinguistics and reading, the psycholinguistics of reading, and analysis of text and discourse. It is concluded that emphases in modern linguistics on interaction and on text, taken with the well-established rigour in analysis and description, are important for much future research in reading.

INTRODUCTION

A good many recent developments in research in reading have been due to the growth of linguistics as a discipline. Gibson and Levin (1975) point to and chart the predominantly curriculum concerns of many earlier researchers, while they acknowledge (and advocate) the interest consistently shown by psychologists. Linguistics, itself a very broad area of study, has not been so carefully examined in relation to research in reading. At the risk, therefore, of neglecting a good deal of other important recent work, this paper concentrates on points at which linguists and researchers into reading have met.

Four areas are of most interest for considering the effect of linguistic research on reading. The four areas, examined in this paper, are: 'linguistic methods' of teaching reading; dialect, code-switching and reading; psycholinguistics of reading (e.g. information processing and model making); analysis of text and discourse.

Longer works than this paper have been addressed to linguistics and reading and it need hardly be said that the intention here is to be suggestive - even provocative - rather than exhaustive. Some of the longer works are mentioned in passing; a recent book on the topic from the International Reading Association (Shafer, 1979) is also worth attention for its attempt to relate reading research and linguistic research, though it must be said that the narrowness of many of the contributions belies its apparently broad scope. Nevertheless, it serves to acknowledge that although the study of reading owes most to psychology there is a considerable, and varied, range of issues of interest to those who research into reading, linguistics and both.

'LINGUISTIC METHODS' IN TEACHING READING

The most obvious influence of linguistics on reading teaching, and the longest established, is in so-called 'linguistic' methods for teaching reading. However, linguistics is so broad a subject that the term 'linguistic method' is at worst meaningless and, at best, has served to indicate that the latest trend or fashion in linguistics does not provide the method for learning to read. Much of the confusion over linguistic methods is due to the fact that there are so many of them, stemming from different emphases in linguistics. Furthermore, there are various possible applications so that one method may appear to succeed well in some circumstances and not in others. Finally, it must be mentioned that the relationship between method and goal is not a simple one : the two interact so that methods may come to define what is to be taught not merely how the teaching should proceed.

One strong trend in linguistic methods has been to adopt the structuralist approach usually attributed to Bloomfield. This employed contrastive analysis and, though originally designed for studying languages in research, was applied by Bloomfield to the learning of Foreign languages and of reading (Bloomfield 1942; and Bloomfield and Barnhart, 1961). Fries (1963) in his book on Linguistics and Reading considers that Bloomfield has been much misunderstood by educationists. However, his severe strictures on educationists as regards their knowledge of linguistics (e.g. 1963, p.33) suggest that the matter is a heated one. It is not Bloomfield's reputation which is at issue here, though, but rather what his followers in the teaching of reading have made of it.

In, for example, The Linguistic Readers, (Stratemeyer and Smith, 1968) we find a structuralist influence. This beginning reading scheme features two frogs, Zip and Tad, and contains sentences such as 'Zip and Tad get wet'. Similar

principles are used in a scheme for British Army recruits of low reading ability (Bramley, 1972) though with greater emphasis on contrastive lists and with the use of recorded tapes.

Structuralism has, as in the examples given, often been taken to support phonic methods, though Fries questions this. Lefevre (1964) in a book of similar title to that of Fries argues for the sentence method from a somewhat similar basis in linguistics. Both Lefevre and Fries agree on the importance of intonation, an aspect often overlooked, though they disagree over whether capital or lower case letters should be used for beginners. Wardhaugh (1969) is less prescriptive, stressing rather the need for linguistic knowledge and awareness among teachers of reading.

Breakthrough to Literacy materials (Mackay et al. 1970) show a different approach. Influenced by Halliday's emphasis on language in society and language in use (see e.g. Halliday, 1978), this scheme includes cards on which words and letters are written so that children can compose their own reading materials.

Morris (1974 on) in Language in Action also draws on linguistics. However, perhaps because the linguistic adviser in a phonetician, explicit knowledge of phonemic analysis and intonation patterns are emphasised. An example of how this knowledge is developed may be found in one of the readers which begins 'Sam wishes as he washes the dishes for Mum' and ends 'Sam stops wishing, and finishes washing the dishes. Then his Mum rushes to get her brushes. She thanks Sam with kisses, while he just blushes and blushes'. (Reid, 1976 pp 1 and 16).

The differences in the approaches mentioned do not, of course, invalidate any or all of them: they do indicate that there is no single linguistic approach to learning to read.

DIALECT, CODE-SWITCHING AND READING

It is a pity that much of the debate over reading and dialect seems to have been on the question of orthographical representation and, particularly, over the regularity or otherwise of English spelling. It now seems to be fairly well established that English has, indeed, a system in spelling though it has morphophonemic rather than phonemic regularity. The evidence is usefully reviewed by Stubbs (1980), who also discusses the growth of standardisation in written forms of the language.

The notion of code switching has attracted a good deal of research in sociolinguistics. In education Bernstein's opaque and shifting use of the term code has given rise to confusion and distracted attention from two important, if obvious, matters. One is that there is code switching, in the sociolinguistic sense, all in communities, though some demand more severe switches than others and the willingness of people to switch codes varies, of course, for complex reasons.

The second point is that reading also involves code switching. The conventions of writing are not those of speech. The differences are more than superficial and are, for example, to do with factors such as the 'disembededness' of writing and speech outside conversational context (Davidson, 1978) or with the explicitness of writing, where dialogue must be represented in soliloquy (Gray, 1977). Young children find the switch difficult as is well established (see e.g. Downing, 1979; Cashdan, 1980) though it can be eased and exploited as in Breakthrough to Literacy.

However, it is not just the differences between oral and written language which we should note from sociolinguistic studies. Their emphasis on function, and on the suitability of utterances for certain social contexts, relates to two other important points about reading. One is that the proficient reader can switch his style of reading to suit his purpose, an issue discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Pugh, 1978). The other is that written forms have their own conventions related to function: familiarity with these conventions of print is necessary for efficient utilisation of this medium.

The argument pursued here, then, leads to emphasis on teaching the functions of reading and writing (as stressed in e.g. Pugh (1978), Downing (1979) and Stubbs (1980)), as well as on the development of skill. Blampain (1979) with reference to French speaking countries, has suggested that the kind of reading done in schools tends to deliberately distort the usual interaction between reader and author and thus inhibits the development of reading. This rather strong view reflects dissatisfaction with the stress on learning to read, rather than learning the use of reading. It also leads us to our next, and last, two sections on models of reading and readers and texts. For the present, it suffices to have stressed that notions such as code switching and communicative competence, commonplaces in sociolinguistics, may be of more relevance to understanding and teaching reading than have, for example, discussions of dialect and reading which assume close correspondences between the conventions of speech and those of writing.

PSYCHOLINGUISTICS OF READING

How the reader reads, i.e. what processes he employs and how he processes information, is of psychological and psycholinguistic interest. Most studies have been of short texts, indeed of sentences or less (Levelt, 1978). Also, the methods used have tended to require linear processing of texts (Pugh,

1978). Nevertheless, the notion of information processing, rather than simple absorption of content, has been a forceful one; it has broadened our conception of what reading in education might be about. It may not have broadened it sufficiently, however.

The influence of Goodman (1968) and Smith (1971) has been most seen in the development of systems for error analysis, especially with regard to context cues. Many of these studies are of oral reading (see Potter , 1980 for a caution) and relatively few have attempted to address themselves to what occurs in silent reading. However, the differences between oral and silent reading appear to be both important and considerable: furthermore, they have been examined by means of error analysis in cloze tests (Neville and Pugh, 1974, 1976 and forthcoming). Study of the role of speech in learning to read and in the processing of adult readers seems, indeed, to be critical to understanding both reading development and the reading process. As we have suggested in the previous section, spoken and written forms have different conventions. Yet speech in some form appears to persist in reading (see Conrad, 1972).

The function of this inner speech remains unclear but its understanding is essential to constructing models of the reading process. Brooks (forthcoming) has examined these models historically: elsewhere he and others have posited an 'articulatory loop' whereby the adult refers to a vocalised or subvocalised version of the text if necessary for comprehension. The matter may not, of course, be as straightforward as this, however, for articulation may be used in both processing and in recognition, and to varying degrees in the two activities.

Discussions of cognitive processing in reading have not only centred on this issue. Underwood and Holt (1979) for example, give an indication of the range of interests to be found at one symposium of cognitive psychologists, though there, too, 'phonological mediation' was a major theme; others include a concern with dysfunctions in reading,recognising that the study of dysfunctions may help in understanding normal processing. So far as the difficulties of the deaf in reading are concerned (see e.g. Brooks, 1980; Conrad, 1979; Kyle, 1980) there is support for the view taken here that the relationship between speech and reading is critical, if complex. On the other hand, there is a danger that 'psycholinguistic' teaching methods and studies in psycholinguistics have tended to employ a linear processing model of reading: even in this, they have tended to confirm the general neglect which we noted earlier of intonation in reading.

ANALYSIS OF TEXT AND DISCOURSE

Whereas, many studies in reading have been concerned with single words or short texts, attention has recently shifted to longer texts; and hence more normal tasks. Such study had been inhibited by several factors: apart from technical problems with e.g. eye-movement equipment, and limited conceptions of what reading involved among teachers and researchers, there was also the problem that linguists had not much addressed themselves to providing descriptions of texts longer than the sentence. Until about ten years ago, the (then) recent work beyond the sentence appeared to be concerned to reduce structural and idiosyncratic features in text as far as possible. Readability formulae, which were becoming influential in text selection in education, reduced text to numbers - so that children could be matched to them by reading age. Information theorists sought similarly to reduce language, and perhaps those who use it. George Miller put it in a paper originally given in 1956: 'I have the impression that some communication theorists regard the human link

in communication systems in much the same way they regard random noise. Both are unfortunate disturbances in an otherwise well-behaved system and both should be reduced until they do as little harm as possible!' (Miller, 1967, p.51).

The simple, transmitter-receiver model of communication has been overtaken by a recognition that participants interact; that readers reconstruct what they read as they process it. This shift reflects, and is largely due to, changes in the study of memory. The nonsense learning tradition of Ebbinghaus has been superseded by the constructive memory approach of Bartlett (see e.g. Baddeley, 1976, for a review). Paradoxically there were correct answers in the recall of nonsense but not in the reconstruction of sense, the sense in Bartlett's work often being in the form of stories.

A problem in earlier studies of reading continuous text was in analysing text and in assessing what was recalled from the text, unless the recall was prompted by questions. Now, though we lack a rhetoric of text structure, there is recognition and delineation of the conventional structures of certain types of text, notably stories and psychological reports (cf Kintsch and Van Dijk, 1978). Also, there are descriptions of text in terms of, for example: story grammars (Bower, 1976), professional analysis (see e.g. Kintsch and Van Dijk, 1978) and cohesive features (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

Such developments permit a description of features of both texts and recall protocols and a matching of the two. Recent work is reviewed and reported in Marshall and Glock (1978) and Tierney et al.(1979).

Extensive use of recall protocols, due to the situation of much of the work in the psychology of memory, has unfortunately resulted in less information on the reading process being available than would be the case if observation

of reading were used. Shebilske and Reid (1979) report a study which used an eye camera to record students reading part of the Decameron in an attempt to explore relations between eye movements and text structure. This, despite technical problems seems a promising line of enquiry.

Nevertheless, there remains a danger in holding constant the variable of reader purpose, by effectively denying him one. For this reason studies such as those which we have reported on location of information in books (e.g. Neville and Pugh, 1977; Pugh, 1979) should also be pursued, since there the reader is interacting with a text in a close simulation of a realistic and purposeful task. The new emphasis on such aspects of reading encourages and permits further studies on these lines, and provides possibilities for more accurate descriptions both of text structures and of readers' strategies.

CONCLUSION

In examining points of common interest between linguists and researchers into reading, this paper has drawn attention to areas of misunderstanding as well as to areas where co-operation can be, and indeed is, profitable. Researchers in some branches of linguistics may have something to learn from the rigorous methodology employed in much reading research, especially with regard to research design and statistical treatment. In particular, the testing of analyses of text provides grounds for (and requires) more empirical testing of models and procedures. However, this paper is not addressed to researchers in linguistics but to researchers into reading and teachers of reading: they have a good deal to gain from following the recent trends in linguistics towards an interactive view of language based, nevertheless,on firm analyses and descriptions.

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